

Bus Drivers

(0*NET 53-3021.00, 53-3022.00)

Significant Points

- Opportunities should be good, particularly for schoolbus driver jobs.
- A commercial driver's license is required to operate a bus.
- Work schedules vary considerably among various types of bus drivers.
- Bus drivers must possess strong customer service skills, including communication skills and the ability to manage large groups of people with varying needs.

Nature of the Work

Every day, millions of Americans every day leave the driving to bus drivers. Bus drivers are essential in providing passengers with an alternative to their automobiles or other forms of transportation. Intercity bus drivers transport people between regions of a State or of the country; local-transit bus drivers do so within a metropolitan area or county; motor coach drivers take customers on charter excursions and tours; and schoolbus drivers take children to and from schools and related events.

Drivers pick up and drop off passengers at bus stops, stations, or, in the case of students, at regularly scheduled neighborhood locations based on strict time schedules. Drivers must operate vehicles safely, especially when traffic is heavier than normal. However, they cannot let light traffic put them ahead of schedule so that they miss passengers.

Local-transit and intercity bus drivers report to their assigned terminal or garage, where they stock up on tickets or transfers and prepare trip report forms. In some transportation firms, maintenance departments are responsible for keeping vehicles in good condition. In others, drivers may check their vehicle's tires, brakes, windshield wipers, lights, oil, fuel, and water supply before beginning their routes. Drivers usually verify that the bus has safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and emergency reflectors in case of an emergency.

During the course of their shift, local-transit and intercity bus drivers collect fares; answer questions about schedules, routes, and transfer points; and sometimes announce stops. Intercity bus drivers may make only a single one-way trip to a distant city or a round trip each day. They may stop at towns just a few miles apart or only at large cities hundreds of miles apart. Local-transit bus drivers may make several trips each day over the same city and suburban streets, stopping as frequently as every few blocks.

Local-transit bus drivers submit daily trip reports with a record of trips, significant schedule delays, and mechanical problems. Intercity drivers who drive across State or national boundaries must comply with U.S. Department of Transportation regulations. These include completing vehicle inspection reports and recording distances traveled and the periods they spend driving, performing other duties, and off duty.

Motorcoach drivers transport passengers on charter trips and sightseeing tours. Drivers routinely interact with customers and tour guides to make the trip as comfortable and informative as possible. They are directly responsible for keeping to strict schedules, adhering to the guidelines of the tours' itinerary, and ensuring the overall success of the trip. These drivers act as customer service representative, tour guide, program director, and safety guide. Trips

frequently last more than 1 day. The driver may be away for more than a week if assigned to an extended tour. As with all drivers who drive across State or national boundaries, motorcoach drivers must comply with Department of Transportation regulations.

Schoolbus drivers usually drive the same routes each day, stopping to pick up pupils in the morning and return them to their homes in the afternoon. Some schoolbus drivers also transport students and teachers on field trips or to sporting events. In addition to driving, some schoolbus drivers work part time in the school system as janitors, mechanics, or classroom assistants when not driving buses.

Bus drivers must be alert in order to prevent accidents, especially in heavy traffic or in bad weather, and to avoid sudden stops or swerves that jar passengers. Schoolbus drivers must exercise particular caution when children are getting on or off the bus. They must maintain order on their bus and enforce school safety standards by allowing only students to board. In addition, they must know and enforce rules regarding student conduct used throughout the school system.

Schoolbus drivers do not always have to report to an assigned terminal or garage. In some cases, they have the choice of taking their bus home, or parking it in a more convenient area. Schoolbus drivers do not collect fares. Instead, they prepare weekly reports on the number of students, trips or "runs," work hours, miles, and fuel consumption. Their supervisors set time schedules and routes for the day or week.

Working Conditions

Driving a bus through heavy traffic while dealing with passengers is more stressful and fatiguing than physically strenuous. Many drivers enjoy the opportunity to work without direct supervision, with full responsibility for their bus and passengers. To improve working conditions and retain drivers, many buslines provide ergonomically designed seats and controls for drivers.

Intercity bus drivers may work nights, weekends, and holidays and often spend nights away from home, during which they stay in hotels at company expense. Senior drivers with regular routes have regular weekly work schedules, but others do not have regular schedules and must be prepared to report for work on short notice. They report for work only when called for a charter assignment or to drive extra buses on a regular route. Intercity bus travel and charter work tends to be seasonal. From May through August, drivers may work the maximum number of hours per week that regulations al-



Drivers must operate vehicles safely and still try to maintain their schedule.

low. During winter, junior drivers may work infrequently, except for busy holiday travel periods, and may be furloughed at times.

Schoolbus drivers work only when school is in session. Many work 20 hours a week or less, driving one or two routes in the morning and afternoon. Drivers taking field or athletic trips, or who also have midday kindergarten routes, may work more hours a week. As more students with a variety of physical and behavioral disabilities assimilate into mainstream schools, schoolbus drivers must learn how to accommodate their special needs.

Regular local-transit bus drivers usually have a 5-day workweek; Saturdays and Sundays are considered regular workdays. Some drivers work evenings and after midnight. To accommodate commuters, many work “split shifts,” for example, 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., with time off in between.

Tour and charter bus drivers may work any day and all hours of the day, including weekends and holidays. Their hours are dictated by the charter trips booked and the schedule and prearranged itinerary of tours. However, like all bus drivers, their weekly hours must be consistent with the Department of Transportation’s rules and regulations concerning hours of service. For example, a driver may drive for 10 hours and work for up to 15 hours—including driving and nondriving duties—before having 8 hours off-duty. A driver may not drive after having worked for 70 hours in the past 8 days. Most drivers are required to document their time in a logbook.

Employment

Bus drivers held about 654,000 jobs in 2002. Over one-third worked part time. More than two-thirds of all bus drivers were schoolbus drivers working primarily for school systems or for companies providing schoolbus services under contract. Most of the remainder worked for private and local government transit systems; some also worked for intercity and charter buslines.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Bus driver qualifications and standards are established by State and Federal regulations. All drivers must comply with Federal regulations and with any State regulations that exceed Federal requirements. Federal regulations require drivers who operate commercial motor vehicles to hold a commercial driver’s license (CDL) from the State in which they live.

To qualify for a commercial driver’s license, applicants must pass a written test on rules and regulations and then demonstrate that they can operate a bus safely. A national databank permanently records all driving violations incurred by persons who hold commercial licenses. A State may not issue a commercial driver’s license to a driver who has already had a license suspended or revoked in another State. A driver with a CDL must accompany trainees until the trainees get their own CDL. Information on how to apply for a commercial driver’s license may be obtained from State motor vehicle administrations.

While many States allow those who are 18 years of age and older to drive buses within State borders, the Department of Transportation establishes minimum qualifications for bus drivers engaged in interstate commerce. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations require drivers to be at least 21 years old and to pass a physical examination once every 2 years. The main physical requirements include good hearing, at least 20/40 vision with or without glasses or corrective lenses, and a 70-degree field of vision in each eye. Drivers must not be colorblind. They must be able to hear a forced whisper in one ear at not less than 5 feet, with or without a hearing aide. Drivers must have normal use of arms and legs and normal blood pressure. They may not use any controlled substances, unless prescribed by a licensed physician. Persons with

epilepsy or diabetes controlled by insulin are not permitted to be interstate bus drivers. Federal regulations also require employers to test their drivers for alcohol and drug use as a condition of employment, and require periodic random tests of the drivers while they are on duty. In addition, a driver must not have been convicted of a felony involving the use of a motor vehicle; a crime involving drugs; driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol; or hit-and-run driving that resulted in injury or death. All drivers must be able to read and speak English well enough to read road signs, prepare reports, and communicate with law enforcement officers and the public. In addition, drivers must take a written examination on the Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Many employers prefer high school graduates and require a written test of ability to follow complex bus schedules. Many intercity and public transit bus companies prefer applicants who are at least 24 years of age; some require several years of experience driving a bus or truck. In some States, schoolbus drivers must pass a background investigation to uncover any criminal record or history of mental problems.

Because bus drivers deal with passengers, they must be courteous. They need an even temperament and emotional stability because driving in heavy, fast-moving, or stop-and-go traffic and dealing with passengers can be stressful. Drivers must have strong customer service skills, including communication skills and the ability to coordinate and manage large groups of people.

Most intercity bus companies and local-transit systems give driver trainees 2 to 8 weeks of classroom and “behind-the-wheel” instruction. In the classroom, trainees learn Department of Transportation and company work rules, safety regulations, State and municipal driving regulations, and safe driving practices. They also learn to read schedules, determine fares, keep records, and deal courteously with passengers.

Schoolbus drivers also are required to obtain a commercial driver’s license from the State in which they live. Many persons who become school bus drivers have never driven any vehicle larger than an automobile. They receive between 1 and 4 weeks of driving instruction plus classroom training on State and local laws, regulations, and policies of operating schoolbuses; safe driving practices; driver-pupil relations; first aid; special needs of disabled and emotionally troubled students; and emergency evacuation procedures. Schoolbus drivers also must be aware of the school system’s rules for discipline and conduct for bus drivers and the students they transport.

During training, bus drivers practice driving on set courses. They practice turns and zigzag maneuvers, backing up, and driving in narrow lanes. Then, they drive in light traffic and, eventually, on congested highways and city streets. They also make trial runs, without passengers, to improve their driving skills and learn the routes. Local-transit trainees memorize and drive each of the runs operating out of their assigned garage. New drivers begin with a “break-in” period. They make regularly scheduled trips with passengers, accompanied by an experienced driver who gives helpful tips, answers questions, and evaluates the new driver’s performance.

New intercity and local-transit drivers are usually placed on an “extra” list to drive charter runs, extra buses on regular runs, and special runs (for example, during morning and evening rush hours and to sports events). They also substitute for regular drivers who are ill or on vacation. New drivers remain on the extra list, and may work only part time, for perhaps several years, until they have enough seniority to be given a regular run.

Senior drivers may bid for the runs that they prefer, such as those with more work hours, lighter traffic, weekends off, or, in the case of intercity bus drivers, higher earnings or fewer workdays per week.

Opportunities for promotion are generally limited. However, experienced drivers may become supervisors or dispatchers, assigning buses to drivers, checking whether drivers are on schedule, re-routing buses to avoid blocked streets or other problems, and dispatching extra vehicles and service crews to scenes of accidents and breakdowns. In transit agencies with rail systems, drivers may become train operators or station attendants. A few drivers become managers. Promotion in publicly owned bus systems is often by competitive civil service examination. Some motorcoach drivers purchase their own equipment and open their own business.

Job Outlook

Persons seeking jobs as bus drivers should encounter good opportunities. Individuals who have good driving records and who are willing to work a part-time or irregular schedule should have the best job prospects. Schoolbus driving jobs, particularly in rapidly growing suburban areas, should be easiest to acquire because most are part-time positions with high turnover and minimal training requirements. Those seeking higher paying intercity and public transit bus driver positions may encounter competition. Employment prospects for motorcoach drivers will fluctuate with the cyclical nature of the economy, as demand for motorcoach services is very dependent on tourism.

Employment of bus drivers is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012, primarily to meet the transportation needs of the growing general population and the school-age population. Many additional job openings are expected to occur each year because of the need to replace workers who take jobs in other occupations or who retire or leave the occupation for other reasons.

The number of schoolbus drivers is expected to increase as a result of growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments. In addition, more schoolbus drivers will be needed as more of the Nation's population is concentrated in suburban areas, where students generally ride schoolbuses, and less in central cities, where transportation is not provided for most pupils.

Employment growth of local-transit bus drivers will be spurred by increases in the number of passengers and in funding levels. Funding levels for public transit may fluctuate as the public's interest in transportation changes. There may be competition for positions with more regular hours and steady driving routes.

Competition from other modes of transportation—airplane, train, or automobile—will temper job growth among intercity bus drivers. Most growth in intercity bus transportation will occur in group charters to locations not served by other modes of transportation. Like automobiles, buses have a far greater number of possible destinations than airplanes or trains. Due to greater cost savings and convenience over automobiles, buses usually are the most economical option for tour groups traveling to out-of-the-way destinations.

Full-time bus drivers are rarely laid off during recessions. However, employers might reduce hours of part-time local-transit and intercity bus drivers if the number of passengers decreases, because fewer extra buses would be needed. Seasonal layoffs are common. Many intercity bus drivers with little seniority, for example, are furloughed during the winter when regular schedule and charter business declines; schoolbus drivers seldom work during the summer or school holidays.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of transit and intercity bus drivers were \$14.22 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$10.51 and \$18.99 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.37, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$22.51 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of transit and intercity bus drivers in 2002 were as follows:

Local government	\$16.95
Interurban and rural bus transportation	15.15
Urban transit systems	15.02
School and employee bus transportation	11.29
Charter bus industry	10.64

Median hourly earnings of schoolbus drivers were \$10.77 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.73 and \$13.53 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.24, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$16.44 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of schoolbus drivers in 2002 were as follows:

School and employee bus transportation	\$11.44
Local government	11.09
Elementary and secondary schools	10.50
Other transit and ground passenger transportation	9.79
Individual and family services	8.27

The benefits bus drivers receive from their employers vary greatly. Most intercity and local-transit bus drivers receive paid health and life insurance, sick leave, vacation leave, and free bus rides on any of the regular routes of their line or system. Schoolbus drivers receive sick leave, and many are covered by health and life insurance and pension plans. Because they generally do not work when school is not in session, they do not get vacation leave. In a number of States, local-transit and schoolbus drivers employed by local governments are covered by a statewide public employee pension system. Increasingly, school systems extend benefits to drivers who supplement their driving by working in the school system during off hours.

Most intercity and many local-transit bus drivers are members of the Amalgamated Transit Union. Local-transit bus drivers in New York and several other large cities belong to the Transport Workers Union of America. Some drivers belong to the United Transportation Union or the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Related Occupations

Other workers who drive vehicles on highways and city streets include taxi drivers and chauffeurs and truck drivers and driver/sales workers.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on employment opportunities, contact local-transit systems, intercity buslines, school systems, or the local offices of the State employment service.

General information on schoolbus driving is available from:

► National School Transportation Association, 625 Slaters Lane, Suite 205, Alexandria, VA 22314.

General information on local-transit bus driving is available from:

► American Public Transportation Association, 1666 K St. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20006.

General information on motorcoach driving is available from:

► United Motorcoach Association, 113 S. West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314.